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UNCLAS RANGOON 000739

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#) [ASSK](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: NLD FAITHFUL TURN OUT FOR ASSK'S 60TH BIRTHDAY

REF: A. SECSTATE 114210

[B.](#) 04 RANGOON 779

¶1. Summary: An estimated 700 persons attended the function sponsored by the National League for Democracy (NLD) to honor the 60th birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK). Although there was a heavy security presence on the street outside NLD headquarters, the event passed peacefully. A few embassies, the U.N., some NGOs, and several reporters were present. Some NLD members who went to worship at Shwe Dagon Pagoda were hassled. End Summary.

¶2. The NLD organized an event at its Rangoon headquarters on June 19 in honor of the 60th birthday of pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, who herself remains incommunicado under house arrest. The NLD was prepared for about 300 participants, but were delighted that around 700 supporters turned up. The headquarters was packed with people and many more listened to the program on the sidewalk outside. After first releasing helium balloons and doves, there were several speeches, including an address by NLD Chairman U Aung Shwe and another by the Chair for the Committee for Women's Affairs, Nang Khin Htwe Myint, NLD MP-elect from Pa-an, Karen State (Note: In 1999 the NLD declared ASSK's birthday as Burma Women's Day. In response, that same year the SPDC established a counter Myanmar Women's Day to be held on July 3, apparently unaware that July 3 is also ASSK's birthday according to the Burmese calendar. End Note.)

¶3. GOB security was very visible with policemen standing in the street, roving police jeeps patrolling the approach roads, and a battery of photographers with video and still cameras recording the images of party members and dignitaries alike.

¶4. The U.S. Embassy was represented by the poloff and spouse, who delivered an envelope containing statements by President Bush, a letter to ASSK from Sec. Rice (ref A), the State Department's press statement, and other media releases on the occasion of ASSK's birthday, as well as a basket bouquet 60 yellow roses. (Note: Yellow, or more specifically saffron, is the NLD's official color and the color that ASSK frequently wears. End Note.) All four EU countries with embassies in Rangoon (France, Germany, Italy and the U.K.) were represented, and in the absence of the U.N. Resident Coordinator, the FAO representative, a Chinese national, was on hand to represent the U.N. A few NGO representatives were also present. Media stringers (Burmese) were present with cameras and tape recorders clearly visible.

¶5. Other activities during the day included a religious service held by the so called "veteran politician group" whose 89-year-old leader, Thakin Thein Pe, shares the same birthday as ASSK. Some NLD members reportedly went to Shwe Dagon Pagoda wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Freedom from Fear," the title of one of ASSK's books. They were asked by the pagoda authorities to change before they were allowed to proceed to the main platform. Some tried to give donations in the name of ASSK, but were told they could not do so. (Note: The names of donors are usually broadcast by loudspeaker to the general public, so donations given in ASSK's name would be clearly heard by all the worshipers.)

¶6. Comment: Indications are that the public was generally aware that June 19 was ASSK's 60th birthday. Beefed up security near ASSK's house and other strategic areas served as a timely reminder. However, aside from the political gatherings mentioned, people quietly went about their daily lives and did not appear to engage in activities that might raise the suspicion of the authorities. End Comment.

McMullen